

What's the difference between PARENT-CHILD DEDICATION and BAPTISM?

This is a question many parents have regarding their newborn or young child. Since families come from various religious and cultural backgrounds, we've prepared this helpful explanation for you.

Parent-Child Dedication is not a Baptism, it is not a sacrament, and it does not impart salvation to the child. Biblical baptism as Jesus taught in God's Word (as opposed to "infant ceremonial baptism" or "christening" as practiced in some church traditions) is the outward expression of a person's personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ; the external declaration of one's internal spiritual repentance and change through personal faith and belief in Jesus and what He did at the cross & resurrection. It is a person's real identification with Christ Jesus by personal coming to grips with what He did as that individual's substitute on the cross.

On the other hand, time to time parents may ask us to do something different that we would describe more as a "Parent Commissioning." That's really what's at the heart of what we're doing with the local body of Christ gathered for it: parents living as devoted followers of Jesus before their children who want to raise their children toward Jesus Christ and publicly testify that aim and effort they'll make.

As parents we cannot "decide" our children's salvation for them. Each must make his/her own decision to enter a personal relationship with Christ by faith. When a child becomes old enough to understand the concept of sin and his/her responsibility for that sin before God, he/she is then ready to make a decision about salvation.

Parents can, however, lay a foundation by their teaching and example to help their child be ready to make that decision when the time comes. An illustration of this is marriage. We don't decide when or if our children will marry and we can't guarantee them a happy marriage. However, our own positive example, faithful instruction, and Godly guidance can lay a foundation for them making a good decision as that time may come.

Parent Commissioning / Parent-Child Dedication

This opportunity is actually best understood as a Parent Commissioning (or commitment). It's a promise parents make, offering their child (usually in infancy, but it can be anytime parents may feel so moved) to the Lord, and dedicating themselves to raising their child for the glory of God. It is fundamental that the parents choosing to commit themselves to raising their child in this way have a clear personal testimony themselves of their own faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

The dedication of children is seen in some passages in the Bible. Hannah dedicated her son, Samuel, to the Lord (*1 Samuel 1:21-28*). As a baby, Jesus was dedicated by his parents (*Luke 2:22-25*). Jesus also bestowed 'blessings of the children' (*Mark 10:13-16*). So, a Child Dedication / Parent Commissioning is viewed as a confirming step parents make before their local church body to raise their child in a Godly way so the child may be faithfully nurtured toward making his/her own decision of personally accepting Christ as Savior and Lord.

Purposes of a Parent Commissioning / Parent-Child Dedication

1. To give parents of young children opportunity to recognize God's gift of a child to them. (*Psalm 127:3*)
2. Parents' declaration of intent live their own lives of authentic faith in Jesus before their child and to raise their child in an atmosphere that loves, worships, and follows Jesus Christ. (*Deut. 6:5-7*)
3. A challenge for parents to guide and educate their child in Jesus and to lay a foundation of learning about God through the use of God's Word and reliance upon the Holy Spirit. (*Eph. 6:4*)